

SWEET BRIAR COLLEGE



3 2449 0511266 1

Bulletin of Sweet Briar College, April, 1961

*A Perspective View
from Monticello*

by JULIAN PARKS BOYD

ARCHIVES

10

7254

592

585

1961

V.44,NO.2

BULLETIN OF SWEET BRIAR COLLEGE
Published by the College in February,
April, July, September, November (2)
VOLUME 44, NUMBER 2 APRIL, 1961

A Perspective View from Monticello

by

JULIAN PARKS BOYD

PROFESSOR OF HISTORY

EDITOR

THE PAPERS OF THOMAS JEFFERSON

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

PHI BETA KAPPA ADDRESS

SWEET BRIAR COLLEGE

FEBRUARY 28, 1961

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2011 with funding from
Lyrasis Members and Sloan Foundation

A Perspective View from Monticello

MY THEME is the place of learning in a time of upheaval, an attempt at perspective in the midst of uncertainty. You who have been distinguished by membership in a society whose aim is to cherish learning will not be surprised if I seek that perspective from a vantage point in the past. It would be more useful, of course, if I could choose the future. "While there is battle and hatred," an astute English scholar has said, "men have eyes for nothing save the fact that the enemy is the cause of all the troubles; but long, long afterwards, when all passion has been spent, the historian sees that it was a conflict between one half-right that was perhaps too willful, and another half-right that was perhaps too proud; and behind even this he discerns that it was a terrible predicament apparently beyond the wit of man to resolve." When that time comes, the passion may be spent, but it is sometimes duplicated in miniature by the historians themselves in their disagreements over what took place and why, thus making it difficult for the rest of us to use the vantage point of the future to any good advantage.

Perhaps it is wise that a view of ourselves from the future is denied to us, yet the very denial should remind us how in distant ages man transformed this enduring handicap into one of his proudest triumphs. Seeking guidance toward hidden destinies, he looked backward whence he came, began to observe, to record, and to communicate his thoughts and aspirations and warnings

across the centuries. He began to lose the wisdom that nature gave him in the guise of instinct and to acquire the more dubious wisdom in the form of record. He alone of all creation was given the wit to draw sustenance for the next stage of the journey by contemplating the predicaments from which—sometimes with honor, sometimes with disillusion—he had managed to escape and to muddle on. This was the first and in many ways the most spectacular exploration of space by man, for it comprehended time as well as distance. By this means he thus discovered, though he has yet to learn, that a people ignorant of history is a people doomed to repeat its tragic errors, blinding itself to the truth that the inescapable enemy of man is man himself.

Every age, of course, is an age of transition, and in some ages the rate and complexity and nature of change have been so violent that we call them ages of revolution. A few men may have lived through revolutions in the past without knowing it, and many men, though aware that great transformation was taking place, have remained unconscious of its nature. But I take it that no one today is ignorant of the fact that we are in the midst of a series of revolutions such as the world has never seen. What impresses us most are the awesome dangers, but we should never forget that the magnitude and extent of this upheaval could not have been achieved if men and ideas had been less powerful than they are. It is a revolution that is at once a splendid tribute and a devastating threat to man's stature. It is taking place in the world-wide upthrust of primitive peoples, in the geometrical increase of population, in the accelerating increase in knowledge, in ignorance, and in the gulf that separates them, and in a thousand other ways that cannot be identified or explained, all overshadowed in our minds by the revolutionary

cross-roads at which man must decide—if indeed the decision is within his power—whether to abandon war as an institution or be abandoned. This all-pervading change affects every aspect of our daily lives, though we find it difficult to discern the impact upon ourselves except in the more palpable manifestations as it touches us all, high and low alike:

*The Queen was in the parlour
Polishing the grate;
The King was in the kitchen
Washing up a plate;
The maid was in the garden,
Eating bread and honey,
Listening to the neighbours,
Offering her more money.*

That version of the nursery rhyme, we are told, made its appearance in London in 1940. Three years later, in a grave war crisis, the President of the United States asked a visiting princess if she had taught her daughters to sew and cook. On recovering from the shock, the royal personage replied with an emphatic negative and then asked why it had ever occurred to him to pose the question. Whereupon, grinning the famous grin that so often concealed a serious purpose, the President said: "I think, perhaps, for their own sake, you had better." We are reminded of Carlyle's comment upon Margaret Fuller's prudent acceptance of the universe and also of Voltaire's famous epitome of history as the sound of silken slippers coming downstairs and the clatter of wooden shoes going up. But we, of all people, should remember that we had as much to do with causing and accelerating this upheaval as any nation, perhaps more than all others. At the outbreak of the French Revolution, that "Atlas of American Independence," John Adams, wrote to his fellow

revolutionist, Samuel Adams: "Your Boston Town Meetings, and our Harvard College, have set the Universe in Motion." This was true, but I prefer the less provincial summation of Thomas Paine: "It was American principles that opened the Bastille." It is American principles, dimly grasped by many of those who seek liberation today and not even understood or always honored by us who first proclaimed them, that are at issue in the revolution of our time.

They are not, of course, *American* principles. Their lineage is ancient and diverse. The concept of the equality of men, of government by consent, of an inviolable right inherent in every man, was asserted long before our sovereign state, or any state, came into being. What we did was nevertheless unique and altogether unprecedented. We rejected the universal form of government then prevalent and established a nation committed to these concepts, a nation made up of peoples from all lands, tolerant of all beliefs, united on the proposition that freedom of opinion and of choice promised the best climate for the fulfillment of human destiny. We thus embraced perhaps the most dangerous form of government known to history, one beyond the capabilities of any save a mature, responsible people possessed of a profound faith that this is the only tolerable form of society. That faith was strong and unequivocal in the people who proclaimed it for their nation in the 18th century. Crèvecoeur spoke of "this new Man, this American," and the American thought of himself as the heir of the ages to whom was given the unique opportunity to demonstrate for all men that man was capable of self-government. He called it the new empire of freedom and his pre-eminent spokesman, Thomas Jefferson, called it the

holy cause of liberty. A wise modern jurist, paraphrasing both Jefferson and Tocqueville, has reminded us that it is "a venture as yet unproved."

When we look at our predicament from that vantage point of history, we seem to stand on a summit of unparalleled achievement and thus to magnify our present frustration and deficiency. The leaders of that age proclaimed an ideal, fought a war to defend it, and organized a body of law and a government to extend it, framing its powers with such wisdom that it is now the oldest form of constitutional government on earth. In the face of this contrast with our situation, we seek to comfort ourselves by thinking of that as a simple, idyllic past, untrammelled by the complexities of the problems of our day. But in attending to this obvious fact we obscure another far more important: *that the contrast may lie more in ourselves, in our attitudes, and in our character as a nation, than in the external disparities.* In some respects, given the state of political progress and of scientific achievement, their task dwarfed ours: it was unprecedented, without a serviceable model, seemingly counter in vital respects to the counsel of experience. "Are there any principles of political Architecture?" asked John Adams. "What are they? Were Voltaire and Rousseau masters of them? Locke taught them Principles of Liberty; but . . . will the struggle in Europe be anything more than a change of Impostors, and impositions?" The questions were addressed to the problems before the creators of a new society in France, but they were the same questions that thoughtful Americans were asking in the midst of their labors a few years earlier, and they are questions still needing to be asked with desperate urgency.

What we are apt to forget is that we are not alone in being denied a perspective view of human crisis. "We are a Luxurious Voluptuous indolent expensive people without Economy or Industry," a well informed Virginian* of the 18th century remarked about his fellow citizens. "Our public and private faith are much . . . shaken and . . . without some speedy and Effectual as well as prudently administered remedy I may venture to say that we are on the eve of political Damnation." It would be difficult to imagine a more incongruous or mistaken appraisal of a people or of their capacity to find a remedy for the crisis confronting them. What this indolent people were doing in the very month in which the words were uttered was to provide the most notable demonstration of capacity for self-government that any nation has ever exhibited. That generation had the character to face their problem, to find and elevate to power men qualified to cope with it in all of its dimensions, to undergo the most elevated public discussion of the principles of government that has ever taken place on this continent, and to make the wise choice despite warnings and dire predictions of "the men of little faith." In brief, for the first time in history, the people of that generation gave an example to the world of a people deliberately changing their form of government by rational discussion rather than by force. We have focussed our attention so long on the practical wisdom in statecraft exhibited by James Madison and others who framed our fundamental law—that "assembly of demigods," Jefferson called them—that we have been in danger of forgetting something that they understood well enough: that if the people had been a "Voluptuous indolent expensive people" lacking in maturity of purpose and of character, the labors of

*Dr. James Currie, Richmond, to Thomas Jefferson, 2 May 1787.

those who led them and spoke for them would have been in vain. They talked much about the national character, and were fond of quoting Algernon Sidney and a host of other writers on government who had asserted over the centuries that a failure of virtue in the people was death to liberty. They were engaged in founding a government, so Jefferson declared, "not in the fears and follies of man, but on his reason, on his sense of right, on the predominance of the social over his dissocial passions." Of all the statesmen of that notable generation who saw that it was the spirit, the resolution, the purpose of the people that would sustain the experiment, no one grasped the fact more firmly than the great Virginian who came from these foothills of the Alleghenies. For him it was not merely the cause of America, and he cannot therefore be imprisoned as he so often has been within the confines of a state or even a national doctrine. He embraced the cause with the passionate "hope and belief . . . that the enquiry which has been excited among the mass of mankind by our revolution and its consequences will ameliorate the condition of man over a great portion of the globe." But this humane hope did not blind him to the hard reality that such a demanding form of government was beyond the capacity of some societies, that nothing could be more incongruous with its principles or fatal to its object than the attempt to prescribe it under all conditions and in all times for every people. It was a form of government to be achieved, not bestowed, and its vitality depended wholly upon "the spirit and manners of the people."

By what magic, then, did that generation of Americans see their task in such clear perspective and meet it so effectively? We note, first of all, that they, too, were unable to discern with prophetic eyes the changes then being initiated in the govern-

ment they knew and admired most. They looked to theorists for the separation, balance, and distribution of power so that it could be properly controlled, being wholly innocent of the fact that the model they thought they were in part copying was undergoing at that moment at the hands of the younger Pitt a transformation that would lead directly to the idea of responsible cabinet government. Thus, simultaneously, the British and the American constitutions were set on diverging paths, with a result that still vexes all Englishmen because ours is not a proper form and is difficult to understand. It is a result that also periodically prompts many Americans—including our last chief magistrate—to toy with the idea of emulating what the 18th century did not foresee and what the intervening years have made so alien to our style and habit of government.

IN POINTING to this notable instance of their failure to see what was happening in their own day, I do not wish to have you think that I am about to join those who have made even more serious indictments of that generation. Far from it. As a people we cherish their houses, we travel to the restorations that convey all of the charm and none of the defects of their society, we read about them in historical novels or at least in the popular journals with colored illustrations, we pay tribute to them on holidays — and then periodically violate almost every principle they declared, the worst and most humiliating affront on decency and freedom being that which we suffered to be perpetrated in the name of national security only a decade ago and that we still tolerate in its less blatant forms.* Our most respected thinkers

*No one, I am sure, will be in doubt that I allude here to the phenomenon known as McCarthyism. Anti-intellectualism, of course, is an ever-present element in our society, but in the years 1950-1954 it attained a virulence that was altogether unprecedented, not

have pointed to this and other departures from our proclaimed ideals as evidence of shortcomings on the part of the founders of the republic. A distinguished American historian told us a generation ago that they were motivated not so much by a zeal for the improvement of the human race or for demonstrating its capacity for self-government — indeed that on this subject they possessed a very healthy scepticism—as by the desire to set up and organize forms of government that, while not hostile to liberty, would make certain that liberty could not do violence to property. Two decades later Carl Becker declared in *The Heavenly City of the 18th Century Philosophers* that theirs was an engaging, humane, but naive faith that placed an exaggerated trust in reason, misconceiving the channels of power for the nature of power itself. Reinhold Niebuhr, one of our greatest

only because of its blatantly cynical disregard of our democratic beliefs and of the most elementary concepts of decency and justice, but also because, for the first time in our history, the voice of responsible and respected opposition — with a few notable exceptions, of which the ministry and the library professions are conspicuous examples — was cravenly silent. In retrospect, however, opposition then was easier and required less courage than now, for that form of anti-intellectualism was personified in an extremely vulnerable manner. At present, the disastrous legacy of those years operates in more subtle and dangerous ways. Far from being repudiated, it is eagerly embraced by many who, in their fear of an external enemy, betray their lack of faith in democracy by their readiness to sacrifice the fundamental rights that Jefferson regarded as a source of strength. As a conspicuous, but unfortunately not an isolated example, I cite the editorial in the *Richmond News-Leader* on the Supreme Court decision in the *Wilkinson and Braden* cases that appeared two days after their address was delivered. Placed beside the moderate editorial in the *New York Times* on the same subject, it offers as good a standard of measure of journalistic opinion as the contrasting majority and dissenting opinions of the Supreme Court do for official expressions. The dissenting opinion of Mr. Justice Black is, in my opinion, an eloquent affirmation of the Jeffersonian position, though it affected the editorial writer of the *News-Leader* very much (and for much the same reasons) as the "Jacobins," "Disorganizers," and "Malcontents" of the late 1790's affected Federalist editors and the jurists of that day who also jailed men for standing on their constitutional rights. Jefferson assailed the Alien and Sedition Acts as being as palpably unconstitutional as if Congress had commanded the people to bow down and worship a golden calf; our generation accepts, with very little protest of a responsible nature, an Act to the same purport that, in some respects, goes much further in violating Jefferson's belief that opinions and beliefs are not subject to the jurisdiction of government.

theologians, said in *The Irony of American History* that the founders were so guilty of misjudging human nature, of overestimating its tendency to decency and of underestimating its propensities for evil, as to postulate an unrealizable ideal, thus causing the inevitable discrepancy between what we have proclaimed and what we have practiced to produce disillusion, frustration, and cynicism on the part of the sensitive and to create an insufferable attitude of moral rectitude on the part of the insensitive. More lately Kenneth Thompson, in his study of *Political Realism: and the Crisis of World Politics*, examining the writings of Lippmann, Niebuhr, Kennan, and others, has called for a more pragmatic approach to our predicament, and grounds his well-argued thesis upon the assumption that American liberals from Jefferson on "have tended consistently to exaggerate the influence of reason and moral force in the world," and have alternated between an isolationism that would shield our beneficent system "from the alien diseases of a decadent Old World or an international approach that endeavors to refashion the strange and ancient societies of Europe and Asia." Most recently John W. Gardner, in his study of the pursuit of excellence—which his publishers, in words that would have dismayed Jefferson, tell us is a "hotly controversial subject"—raises the question whether we can at the same time be equal and excellent, concludes that we often regard the problem inconsistently but must cherish both concepts, and implies that the Jeffersonian position overlooked this dilemma of democracy. And I must confess with some sadness that my colleagues in the history profession have been so busily picking over the dessicated bones of the Beardian thesis that they have not only permitted these analyses to go unchallenged but have become so ardent in con-

troversy as to make it more and more difficult for anyone to discern the nature of that generation's momentous accomplishment or to understand what they were about. In brief, we have done almost everything to them except to profit from their example.

They would be among the first, if we may judge from the precept of Thomas Jefferson, to advise us not to make the attempt. "The earth belongs in usufruct to the living," he proclaimed over and over, expecting that each generation would have the maturity to face its own problems in its own way. If, however, I invite your attention on this occasion to a single figure in that notable generation of American leaders, it is because I think no other understood so clearly what the experiment was about and no other equalled him in the strength of his commitment to its principles. Jefferson's overriding claim to our attention, I believe, is that his faith was a humane aspiration, that he did emphasize man's capacity for benevolence more than his capacity for evil, that he was irrevocably committed to a society founded on the great moral proposition that there is in every man something so sacred that it cannot be violated by any government, ever, for any cause. This was the position he took in the very beginning and there is no evidence that he ever turned his glance in any other direction than that in which he travelled. This does not mean that he was not realistic or pragmatic. It does not mean that he was ignorant of the evil that is present in human nature. It does not mean that he was unaware of the limitations of the mind of man. It *does* mean that he was a man of a profound moral conviction, and it is my firm belief that he was one of the most realistic statesmen of American

history primarily because his was an undeviating moral commitment to the idea of a free society. The quality that distinguishes Jefferson from almost all other political figures is that his life and acts defined the sort of society he wished to see and did this with such powerful impact that a whole people responded—and still respond—to his whole-hearted affirmation. His amazingly diverse accomplishments pointed consistently to this single end. His central purpose, as James Parton discerned in a tribute that I think would have pleased Jefferson most, was the endeavor to make himself “the perfect citizen.”

HOW came such a man with such a transcendent purpose to be produced among the red hills of Albemarle in the mid-18th century? In less than half a century later he would return from Paris with the respect and even affection of the chief intellects in that center of science and culture, but with little notice from the circles of the court and of the diplomatic corps. The distinction is important, for it underscores the next most significant fact about Jefferson. He was an intellectual, delighting in the explorations of which the mind only was capable, enriching himself and his age by his insatiable love of learning, unable to live without books and the means of communicating with cultivated men. His range was so great that it encompassed every avenue of knowledge from astronomy to zoology. In each of these branches he made it his business to become schooled in its elements. In some—such as history, government, and law—he became learned. And in a few—linguistics, paleontology, agronomy, and metrology—he made significant original contributions. How came such a man to be bred on the fringe of settlement that looked in one direction toward an unexplored wilderness and in the

other toward a fluid but highly-stratified society? John Adams, of course, was right in thinking that Harvard College, the public schools, and the democratic town meetings of New England had helped forge American principles. But so, too, had Virginia, which not only lacked these institutions but in addition was a frankly aristocratic society broadly based upon the institution of slavery. Just as there is no exchange of correspondence in American history so fascinating as that between John Adams and Thomas Jefferson in their reflective years of retirement, so there is nothing in it more striking than the argument of the New Englander in favor of artificial forms and distinctions opposing that of the Virginian in behalf of an aristocracy of virtue and talent. Thus, recognizing as we do the importance of motivation in human behavior, we should not forget in our pursuit of excellence that high purpose may spring from negative causes, that revulsion as well as emulation has its uses.

We all know the profound effect that two of Jefferson's teachers exerted upon him—William Small and George Wythe. They opened to his view the grandeur of Greece and Rome, but also added to that a knowledge "of the system of things in which we are placed," and gave him a glimpse of the possibility of a nation moving "beyond the reach of Athenian destinies." They grounded him in mathematics, in long forgotten rules of rhetoric, in ancient and modern languages, and in the classic writers on civil government. They put him, in a word, in touch with the mainsprings of human aspiration, and we owe them an immeasurable debt. But teachers appear in many guises. One of those who helped to enlarge the horizons of this Albemarle boy and to make his life and our heritage all the richer, was a man whose

very name is lost to us. He was a drunken porter who lived by the college gate, and we may guess that he had once known a more elevated plane in society, for he happened somehow to possess an ancient book on architecture. We do not know its title. It may have been Perrault's translation of Marcus Vitruvius Pollio, an architect who lived in the time of Augustus. It may have been an early edition of Andrea Palladio. It may have been Perrault's own *Treatise of the Five Orders of Columns in Architecture*. It may have been LeRoy's *Ruins of Athens* or Desgodets' *Ancient Buildings of Rome*. It may have been any or none of these, and we shall probably never know. What we do know is that it was this purchase of an old book from the college porter that first opened to Jefferson's view the riches of the world of fine arts. We may therefore trace to a college menial the stimulus that ultimately caused the classical revival to begin in America a full generation before it did in France or England; that produced the plan for a university bringing students, teachers, and classrooms into a relationship more salutary for all than the single prison-like structure that had dominated American college architecture theretofore; and that caused Monticello to become a physical embodiment of that most discerning comment about Jefferson—that he had in youth placed his mind, like his habitation, upon an elevated spot from which to contemplate the universe. But before the teachers opened up new vistas to him, before the accidental meeting with the porter, the young man had chosen a vantage point from which to gain his own perspective and to determine his attitude toward man.

It was this attitude toward man, so Woodrow Wilson thought, that constituted Jefferson's true greatness. I cannot

agree. We have had too much experience with political figures who were merely benevolent in purpose, who merely meant well, not to know that this scarcely qualifies for greatness. Jefferson's greatness lay, on the contrary, in the ordered symmetry of his life, in his identification with the society in which he lived, in his infinitely patient, unremitting effort to change it in the direction of progress, in his refusal to move too far ahead of the habits and customs of the day, and in his similar rejection of habit and custom as the mainspring of policy—in a word, his achievement rested as much in his pragmatic approach to government as in the steadfast benevolence of his purpose. How and where did he acquire these qualities? He "quitted college after two years," so he informs us without explaining why. We may guess without hesitation, however, that he did so because in the teachings of Small and Wythe he had already gained everything that the College of William and Mary had to offer. He then embarked upon a process of education that would continue as long as he lived, a process which involved the delights of exploration in mathematics, languages, history, and science and also brought the conviction that in a free society education is the most important concern of the state. In one sense the education that he had acquired had only strengthened an attitude: Jefferson possessed as a statesman no pretensions to *expertise* in any area of knowledge. He was one of the most versatile men of learning of his age, but what distinguished him was the usefulness of his equipment and the end to which it was directed, not the depth of his penetration of any specialized branch of knowledge. The nature of that equipment was simple, but its essence was that it provided the means for exploring virtually every area of knowledge or for meeting unforeseen tasks with

intelligence. He was trained, as were most young men of his day, in grammar and rhetoric. He knew how to construct a sentence and to shape it either for an elevated or an expository purpose, knowing full well that the style of a report on a decimal system of coinage was not that appropriate for the declaration of a nation's ideals. He knew the rudiments of mathematics and somewhat beyond, for at a certain point he thought that the science of calculation was a luxury—"a delicious luxury indeed, but not to be indulged in by one who is to have a profession to follow for his subsistence." He had dipped into other branches of science that he thought worth the attention of every man: "astronomy, botany, chemistry, natural philosophy, natural history, anatomy. Not indeed to be proficient in them," he explained, "but to possess their general principles and outlines, so as that we may be able to amuse and inform ourselves further in any of them as we proceed through life and have occasion for them. Some knowledge of them is necessary for our character as well as comfort." Both the nature of Jefferson's learning and his attitude toward it are revealing. Respect for the intellect was essential, but an understanding of its nature was not less so. He did not need Henry James to tell him that there were "two very bad things in this American land of ours, the worship of money and the worship of intellect." The intellect, of course, was to be cherished and used with unremitting zeal, industry, and imagination. But the essential ingredient was character, and this of course implied an attitude toward man. The foundation was a good one for the citizen or for a philosopher-statesman. It is not for his brilliant or versatile intellectuality alone that Jefferson deserves the place he is rightfully coming to hold as a cultural hero, but also for his good sense, his benevolent attitude,

his understanding of the need to discipline both mind and heart, and his realistic engagement with the crisis confronting the society of that particular age.

What I have been indirectly suggesting, of course, is that our salvation does not lie in learning or in reason or in intellectual prowess. These are indispensable but they must also be viewed in perspective. It is a curious fact that ours should have been the age to produce the harshest indictment of the Age of Jefferson for its supposedly naive faith in reason. For, on the one hand, our age has indulged in a wave of anti-intellectualism that would have been unthinkable in that day, and, on the other hand, we have granted to those possessing claims to intellectual *expertise* of one sort or another a degree of influence over policy that would have been incomprehensible to the founders of the republic. The one betrays too little faith in ourselves, the other too much faith in the expert. Both violate sense and practical reason to an extent that the 18th century would scarcely have tolerated. The philosopher-statesmen of that era did not divorce responsibility for deciding policy and responsibility for being themselves informed of its consequences and alternatives. Such a divorce promises to become almost complete in our day because of our reliance upon the expert, our incredibly naive trust in the power of the intellect.*

*I refer here to our increasing tendency to assume that progress toward the solution of a problem cannot be made until its nature, its alternatives, and the consequences of various possible solutions have been fully canvassed by experts designated to study all of its manifold aspects. It is probable that the tendency has been accelerated, if not largely caused, by the impact of the military upon civilian attitudes, and it seems certain that it has reached the last extremes of absurdity within the military hierarchies. Such organizations as the Rand Corporation, with contractual obligations to furnish ideas, criticisms, and analyses to the military agencies, are no doubt necessary and even useful, but one now begins to observe proposals for contractual analyses of the analyzers' analyses and to hear of former university personnel becoming so captivated with certain research

Consider for example, our changing attitudes toward what Jefferson called opposing principles of administration. Lord Bryce and Nikita Khrushchev, to choose two opposite ends of the spectrum, seem in agreement with Ambrose Bierce that our two great political parties are indistinguishable coalitions, engaging in "contests of interests masquerading as principles." Some political scientists have come to see virtue in this apparent similarity, beholding in it less clamor, distortion, and confusion, and a more mature manner of arriving at compromises and accommodations of issues. It is understandable why this situation appeals to the politician: it makes things easier for him, because it augments the difficulty facing the citizen who wishes to hold him to account. But the intellectual analysis seems in part a rationalization for what has actually come to be, and its validity

problems — for example, the effect of public demand upon the problem of disarmament — as to desire to retire from such an organization as Rand in order to gain a year or so of perspective study in an academic atmosphere. — What the assumption overlooks is that the elemental decisions in business, in the ordinary concerns of daily life, and in government depend inevitably upon two facts: (1) they must usually be made without full possession of the data, perhaps even in opposition to what the known facts may suggest; and (2) they come down in the final analysis to the attitudes and prepossessions of those making the decisions and of the freedom with which it is possible for them to decide. Consider, for example, the task assigned Jefferson in 1790 to draw up a plan or plans for a uniform system of weights and measures. What he produced within a few weeks, in the intervals of an intermittent, incapacitating head-ache, was a plan of classic simplicity, combining in perfect unison the Newtonian concept of an ordered system in nature and the Lockian principles of natural right — a decimalized, unified, symmetrical system that would put it in the capacity of "every man who has a rule in his pocket" to ascertain for himself the measure or weight of anything he wished to buy or sell. This was a plan based upon an attitude toward human nature. Its simplicity and the readiness of the country at that time to experiment and to innovate made it quite possible that if enough others had shared that attitude, adoption could have been effected. But those having a contrary attitude—Robert Morris, for example—opposed so dangerous an expedient as being unnecessary and too costly. In 1961, after decades of study and after an incalculable increase in the cost of delaying to take such a simple step, the universal inch is about to be adopted. Jefferson appealed to experts, also, but after he had himself mastered the elements of the subject and had decided on principle what reason and justice indicated to be the wise course. The essential point to note is that he appealed to the experts to verify his findings, not to advise him on the direction of policy.

both in theory and in practice is extremely dubious. It may be the system that we shall have to accept, but it is not one that either Alexander Hamilton or Thomas Jefferson would have tolerated. "Vibrations of power," wrote Hamilton in one of his most penetrating observations about the American system, "... are the genius of our government." Thus he discerned at the beginning what historians have come to endorse, that alterations of power, swinging pendulum-like from left to right, from action to inaction, from vigor to lethargy, reflect the moods and responses of the people to one or the other enduring polarities of thought and principle about man and society. Jefferson was in agreement with Hamilton on this—one of the few propositions on which they could unite. There was a natural division among men, he thought, and the names of Whig and Tory, Jacobin and Ultra, Republican and Federalist, were interchangeable with names that had gone before and would come after his day, being applicable on the one hand to those who placed their confidence in the capacity of the people and on the other to those who feared and mistrusted them. Tocqueville supported such a concept. He thought that at the inception of the American government there existed a division between two opinions—"two opinions . . . as old as the world, and which are to be met with under all the forms and all the names which have ever obtained in free communities—the one tending to limit, the other to extend indefinitely, the power of the people." Public morality suffered by extinction of this political divergence, Tocqueville believed, though the extinction in his day seems negligible compared with what is to be observed in ours. Now, in place of the alternating dialogue, the "vital center" has been preempted. There the accommodations and arrangements seem likely to take place. Thus

the chief political development of the next decade may hinge upon the effect of this upon a great political party that is essential to the health of our system. The process will have been expedited by intellectuals out of power who accepted the implications of the theory of alternating public moods but in office seem content with a system of arrangements and accommodations at the vital center.* This was not the system of the 18th century. There were profound differences of principle between the party of Hamilton and the party of Jefferson, and that difference was known to the entire literate world.

Our trust in the intellectual is even more striking if we look at the central problem of our time. Faced with what Walter Millis has called, I think with reason, two irrefutable propositions — “that a continuation of the present state of international affairs is bound sooner or later to produce a catastrophe in which most civilized values . . . will perish; and that no strategic inventions, no new ‘national security’ policies, no jugglings with weapons systems and armaments, are likely to alter this prognostication” — before this perhaps insoluble problem, we acquiesce in the assumption so blandly made and so often repeated that “‘disarmament’ is a subject . . . calling for profound (and of course classified) technical knowledge and the most sensitive intellectual *expertise*,” and that, therefore, we must proceed slowly, study the problem, and await the verdict. We have heard the recent

*I mean, specifically, that with the center being intentionally occupied and the left inaccessible for obvious and historic reasons, the Republican party — which is essential to the healthy functioning of our system — will perhaps be driven further and further toward the position occupied by Senator Goldwater, to its own and the nation's detriment. It is curious to note that Professor Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., during the late campaign, laid much emphasis upon the concept that Hamilton called “Vibrations of Power,” yet it is with his name that the concept of preempting the center is most conspicuously linked.

announcement that the number of those experts studying the problems of disarmament have been increased by half, and we are supposed to draw comfort from this. But since we have already had in hand for some months the whole spectrum of opinion of the experts on this subject, running from the fantastic assumptions of Herman Kahn to the other extremity occupied in almost lonely solitude by Linus Pauling, how can we conclude otherwise than that the multiplication of *expertise* may only be multiplication of differences?*

The 18th century may not have had a comparable problem, but it certainly had no such exaggerated faith in the power of the intellect. The decision in this realm is too serious to be left to the experts. It is a moral and political decision which must be demanded by a sobered people, who have reason enough to know and to see clearly that the alternatives are intolerable.

*I refer here to the symposium on the subject in *Daedalus*. The brilliant virtuosity of Kahn's performance and perhaps also our apparent willingness to accept the expert's word for it — especially those experts possessing a persuasive, articulate, and sophisticated manner — may account for the generally laudatory reception his book has received. But for a notable exception, see the review in the March, 1961, *Scientific American*. The same reviewer takes an equally dismal view of the symposium sponsored by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences: "if this issue of *Daedalus* is a fair sample of the high thoughts of American academicians on the 'potentially feasible routes as well as the obstacles to arms control,' then American arts and sciences are in a bad way, and unless a new crop of sensible politicians comes to the rescue, we can kiss ourselves and posterity good-by." This turning for a ray of hope from the intellectual toward a possible new crop of sensible politicians should not be too shocking: actually it illustrates the point I have been making — policy (the word itself stems from the same source as *politician*) should be in the hands of politicians. Their decisions should be rational, and it would be desirable if, like Jefferson, Madison, Wilson, Adams, and others of the 18th century, they could also be intellectuals. But above all they should be responsible, particularly in those areas — such as disarmament, for example — where too literal a reliance upon the expert might eliminate the moral, or even the sensible, elements of the decision. There is not too much danger that the politician will depend upon the intellectual, however: it is more likely that, aside from leaning toward the irrational, anti-intellectual impulses of the society, he will turn to the military for what is too often and too mistakenly thought of as a military problem. It is not that so much as it is the paramount political and social problem, overriding all others in our time.

I hope, in addressing a society devoted to intellectual achievement, I have not given you the impression that I value it less than I should. What I have tried to do, as I indicated in the beginning, was to choose a vantage point from which to gain a perspective that might be useful to us on this occasion. I chose that elevated point assumed by a Virginian whose life, as John Dewey wisely perceived, was one of singular consistency, its great object pursued uninterruptedly in one direction, its achievement both intellectual and moral. The statement of a philosophy of government for a free people; the affirmation that the opinions and conscience of men are not under the jurisdiction of the public official; and the founding of the University of this Commonwealth, dedicated to the proposition that the object of all science is the freedom and happiness of man—these are the three great achievements by which Jefferson wished to be remembered. All three are in the realm of the intellect, and all three imply that the mind must be free, informed, and unintimidated if self-government is to endure.

But perhaps my theme would have been more effectively stated if I had quoted to you one of the great love letters of our language. That letter is the famous dialogue of the head and the heart that Jefferson wrote to Maria Cosway in 1786 under the compulsion of a momentary infatuation. "Respect for myself," said the heart to the head, "now obliges me to recall you into the proper limits of your office. When nature assigned to us the same habitation, she gave us over it a divided empire. To you she allotted the field of science, to me that of morals. When the circle is to be squared, or the orbit of a comet to be traced; when the arch of greatest strength, or the solid of least resistance is to be

investigated, take you the problem: it is yours: nature has given me no cognizance of it. In like manner in denying you the feelings of sympathy, of benevolence, of gratitude, of justice, of love, of friendship, she has excluded you from their controul. To these she has adapted the mechanism of the heart. Morals were too essential to the happiness of man to be risked on the uncertain combinations of the head. She laid their foundation therefore in sentiment, not in science. That she gave to all, as necessary to all: this to a few only as sufficing with a few. . . . If our country, when pressed with wrongs at the point of the bayonet, had been governed by it's heads instead of it's hearts, where should we have been now? hanging on a gallows as high as Haman's. You began to calculate and to compare wealth and numbers: we threw up a few pulsations of our warmest blood: we supplied enthusiasm against wealth and numbers: we put our existence to the hazard, when the hazard seemed against us, and we saved our country."

I think Maria Cosway never knew whether this was a love letter at all or, if so, whether the head or the heart prevailed. What we may be certain of is that both mind and sentiment were here united in a harmony of grace and power possessed by few if any other love letters. What this remarkable expression shows is what Jefferson's life shows—that he committed both his intellect and his heart. He became the living conscience of the nation, a symbol of what the responsible citizen might achieve by giving due rein to mind and morals in their respective spheres. He achieved in himself a harmonious federalism of the spirit analogous to the federalism of the empire for liberty that he did so much to create. The perspective furnished by his example

is sharply defined for us by the remarks of two far-seeing natives of France, one an intellectual, the other a political leader. Lacépède, beholding the fostering climate for the growth of science and education provided by Jefferson's administration as president, remarked that up to that time the movement of civilization had been from east to west. If, he concluded, the American people remained true to their destiny, this movement would be reversed. The condition implied a possibility that Jefferson also was realistic enough to assume—that ultimately a degeneracy from the principles of liberty might come about. Within recent days the leader of the French people, whom Walter Lippmann has hailed as one of the few statesmen of our time possessing insight into the probable future course of affairs, has called for the formation of an Atlantic community of Latin peoples. "Who knows," asked General de Gaulle, "whether the next age of reason may come from this direction?" The unintended but implied commentary upon the condition stated by Lacépède should be profoundly sobering to us as we contemplate ourselves from the vantage point of Monticello.





